

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4624

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY IALAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 14004

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, IN

SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON INDIA'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER,
Y.B. CHAVAN.

1. Y.B. CHAVAN SHOULD DO WELL AS FOREIGN MINISTER. HE BRINGS TO HIS NEW ASSIGNMENT A MATURE POLITICAL ACUMEN AND A QUIET COMPETENCE THAT HAVE SERVED HIM WELL IN HIS LONG ASCENT FROM PEASANT ORIGINS IN MAHARASHTRA. HE HAS ALREADY HELD THE GOI'S THREE OTHER MOST PRESTIGIOUS PORTFOLIOS: DEFENSE, HOME, AND MOST RECENTLY, FINANCE. AS DEFENSE MINISTER IN 1962-1966 HE HANDLED THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR ARMS PURCHASES FROM THE US AND THE USSR. AS FINANCE MINISTER, 1970-1974, HE WAS INDIA'S CHIEF DELEGATE TO INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL MEETINGS SUCH AS THE ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE IBRD/IMF AND THE ADH; AND HE WAS THE INDIAN MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE OF 20.

2. CHAVAN'S SEASONED POLITICAL TALENTS SHOULD PROVE USEFUL IN DIPLOMACY. HE PROJECTS STRENGTH, AND DIGNITY. DURING A LONG
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CAREER IN STATE AND NATIONAL LEVEL POLITICS, HE PREFERRED TO

RELY ON PERFECTED TECHNIQUES OF CONCILIATION, PERSUASION AND THE SUBTLE APPLICATION OF PRESSURE RATHER THAN ON PUBLIC DENUNCIATION OR RIGID ENFORCEMENT OF PARTY DISCIPLINE. HE IS PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN OBTAINING A CONSENSUS BY ENCOURAGING COMPROMISE. HE CAN ALSO BE FIRM WHEN NECESSARY. AS A POLITICAL TACTICIAN, HE HAS PROVEN HIGHLY FLEXIBLE IN DEALING WITH BOTH ISSUES AND POLITICIANS. DURING THE SUCCESSION POLITICS OF 1964 AND 1966, AND AGAIN DURING THE CONTEST BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE SYNDICATE LINED UP AGAINST HER IN 1969, HE SAT ON THE FENCE HOPING TO EMERGE AS THE COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. IN 1964 AND 1966, THE CONGRESS PARTY CHOSE MORE ASSERTIVE CANDIDATES. IN 1969, WHEN CHAVAN FINALLY DESCENDED THE FENCE, IT WAS IN FAVOR OF THE SYNDICATE. HE THEN QUICKLY IF IGNOBLY SWITCHED ALLEGIANCES WHEN MRS. GANDHI ESTABLISHED HER DOMINANCE. SINCE THE CONGRESS PLIT, CHAVAN HAS ATTEMPTED TO EMPHASIZE HIS TOTAL PERSONAL LOYALTY TO MRS. GANDHI. WERE THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP VACANT, HE WOULD ONCE AGAIN BE A LEADING CANDIDATE FOR INDIA'S MOST POWERFUL OFFICE.

3. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: CHAVAN'S STYLE IS LOW KEY. HE IS A LISTENER RATHER THAN A TALKER. HE IS UNDEMONSTRATIVE WHEN HE SPEAKS IN PRIVATE OR IN PUBLIC, BUT HIS MANNER AND TONE CARRY AUTHORITY AND COMMAND ATTENTION. CHAVAN POSSESSES A QUIET CHARM AND A SHREWDNESS IN JUDGING CHARACTER. HE PREFERS TO DRESS IN AN INDIAN DHOTI WHETHER ABROAD OR AT HOME. HIS ENGLISH IS CLEAR AND INTELLIGIBLE.

4. CHAVAN'S SOCIAL ORIGINS ARE MODEST. HE IS A MEMBER OF THE PROUD, AGRICULTURALIST, MARATHA CASTE, WHOSE TOUGH, PEASANT SOLIDIERY PROVIDED THE FOUNDATION OF THE RISE OF MARATHA MILITARY POWER IN INDIA FROM THE 17TH TO THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY. HE REPRESENTS NEITHER THE OLD ELITE IN TERMS OF CASTE ORIGIN NOR THE PROFESSIONAL, ANGLICIZED ELITE THAT HAS PLAYED SUCH A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE LATER COLONIAL AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD.

5. CHAVAN'S POLITICS: Y.B. CHAVAN IS ABOVE ALL A POLITICAL ANIMAL. HIS WHOLE ADULT LIFE HAS BEEN SPENT IN POLITICS. BEGINNING AS A NATIONAL WORKER WHILE STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL, HE WAS FIRST JAILED BY THE BRITISH AT THE AGE OF 18. DURING HIS COLLEGE DAYS, AND AFTER, HE SLOWLY BUT STEADILY WORKED HIS WAY UP FROM LOCAL CONFIDENTIAL

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TO DISTRICT AND STATEWIDE POSITIONS IN THE HIGHLY COMPETITIVE CONGRESS ORGANIZATION IN MAHARASHTRA. AS A POLITICIAN HE HAS BEEN A SOLID ORGANIZATIONAL MAN, REALISTIC, A HARD WORKER, AND EFFECTIVE. DURING SIX YEARS AS CHIEF MINISTER IN MAHARASHTRA, HE USED HIS LARGE, RURAL-BASED MARATHA CASTE AND A PERVASIVE NETWORK OF RURAL COOPERATIVES TO BUILD A CONGRESS POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WHICH CONTINUES TO DOMINATE POLITICS IN THAT STATE TODAY. (40 OF THE LARGE BLOC OF 45 MPS THAT MAHARASHTRA SENDS TO

THE LOK SABHA ARE CONGRESS; 10 PERCENT OF THE ALL-INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP IS FROM MAHARASHTRA AS IT A QUARTER OF THE GNP.) CHAVAN HAS RETAINED A CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE POLITICAL MACHINE HE PUT TOGETHER MORE THAN A DECADE AGO. THAT MACHINE, MORE THAN HIS LONG EXPERIENCE AT THE CENTER, IS THE MAINSTAY OF HIS INFLUENCE AND POWER.

6. CHAVAN AS FINANCE MINISTER: CHAVAN BUILT A RESPECTABLE REPUTATION AS AN ABLE AND EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATOR WHEN DIRECTING THE DEFENSE AND HOME MINISTRIES FROM 1962 TO 1970. HE REPORTEDLY TOOK THE FINANCE PORTFOLIO IN 1970 WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE AND NEVER FELT COMPLETELY AT HOME IN THE POSITION. SOME POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT MRS. GANDHI, SMARTING FROM CHAVAN'S BELATED SUPPORT IN 1969, GAVE HIM FINANCE TO DEFLATE HIS POLITICAL IMAGE. FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 10 CABINET RESHUFFLE, THE INDIAN PRESS GENERALLY SUMMED UP CHAVAN'S TENURE AT FINANCE AS "UNDISTINGUISHED," CITING THE INFLATION AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE PLAGUED INDIA. THIS MAY BE SOMEWHAT UNFAIR, GIVEN THE LARGE DIMENSIONS OF INDIA'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND THE POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS THAT SEVERELY LIMITED CHAVAN'S FLEXIBILITY IN FORMULATING FISCAL POLICIES.

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7. AT INTERNATIONAL FINANCE MEETINGS, CHAVAN WAS A PERSISTENT PROPONENT OF THE LDC POINT OF VIEW AND A FERVENT ADVOCATE OF THE SDR-AID LINK. DURING THE RECENT OIL CRISIS HE ACCUSED THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES OF EXCESSIVE USE OF PETROLEUM AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, BUT REFRAINED FROM ANY CRITICISM OF THE OIL EXPORTERS.

8. IDEOLOGICAL MOORINGS: DURING HIS FORMATIVE YEARS, CHAVAN WAS STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY THE IDEAS OF GANDHI, NEHRU, AND M.N. ROY. ROY WAS ORIGINALLY A COMMUNIST WHO BROKE WITH STALIN AND SUBSEQUENTLY ABANDONED MARXISM IN FAVOR OF A DEMOCRATIC-SOCIALIST PHILOSOPHY. AS A YOUNG MAN, CHAVAN WAS DRAWN TO THE RADICALISM OF COMMUNISM BUT REJECTED MEMBERSHIP IN THE PARTY BECAUSE OF HIS STRONG NATIONALIST ORIENTATION AND THE COUNSEL OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE CONGRESS PARTY. HIS RADICALISM IN LATER YEARS MELLOWED INTO THE STRAIGHT BRAND OF NEHRU SOCIALISM, WITH PROGRESSIVELY LESS CONCERN FOR IDEOLOGICAL GENERALITIES. HIS PRESENT IDEOLOGICAL OUTLOOK IS BEST CHARACTERIZED AS NON-DOCTRINAIRE WITH A DEEP ATTACHMENT TO DEMOCRACY, A STRONG OPPOSITION TO TOTALITARIANISM, AND A COMMITMENT TO THE EVOLUTIONARY AND NON-VIO-

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LENT REFORM OF SOCIETY. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH AMERICANS, HE HAS EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR US DEMOCRACY AND AFFINITY FOR PRESIDENTS JEFFERSON, LINCOLN, AND KENNEDY. AS A PRACTICING POLITICIAN AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS, CHAVAN HAS FOLLOWED A PRAGMATIC, NON-IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH. HE IS CONSIDERED BY MOST INDIAN POLITICAL OBSERVERS TO BE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CONGRESS IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM, IF NOT SOMEWHAT TO THE RIGHT, AT LEAST IN PART BECAUSE OF HIS CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL BASE IN MAHARASHTRA.

10. CHAVAN IS FIRST AND FOREMOST AN INDIAN NATIONALIST. IT WAS HIS STRONG SENSE OF NATIONALISM THAT LED HIM TO PART COMPANY WITH THE OYISTS IN 1939 OVER SUPPORT FOR THE BRITISH IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR. ROY THOUGHT GERMAN NAZISM A GREATER THREAT TO THE WORLD THAN BRITISH IMPERIALISM. BUT THEN THIS SAME NATIONALISM HAS DISPOSED CHAVAN TO SEE THE COMMUNISTS AS AGENTS OF SOVIET POWER, ANOTHER FOREIGN REGIME. AT LEAST HE SEEMS TO DO SO MORE THAN MANY OF HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES. HIS DEEP SENSE OF NATIONALISM AND DESIRE TO PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN INDIAN NATIONAL INTERESTS, COUPLED WITH HIS PERSONAL LOYALTY TO MRS. GANDHI WILL STRONGLY INFLUENCE HIS PERFORMANCE IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

1. CHAVAN'S VIEW OF THE U.S.: CHAVAN HAS LONG AVOIDED IDENTIFICATION WITH EITHER OF THE SUPER POWERS. AS DEFENSE MINISTER AND LATER FINANCE MINISTER HE DEVELOPED FRIENDLY CONTACTS IN BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION. BOMBAY-BASED ECON-

OMIC TIMES EDITOR ROGNEKAR TOLD A BOMBAY CONGEN OFFICER THIS WEEK THAT HE CONSIDERED CHAVAN'S APPOINTMENT AN INDICATION OF MRS. GANDHI'S DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE US. OTHERS HAVE ECHOED THIS OBSERVATION AND WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS THAT THE SOVIET EMBASSY IS NOT PLEASED WITH CHAVAN'S APPOINTMENT. LONG-TIME CHAVAN ASSOCIATE AND MAHARASHTRA TIMES EDITOR GOVIND TALWALKAR CITED THE RECENT RUPEE SETTLEMENT AS PROOF OF CHAVAN'S DESIRE TO SEE AN IMPROVEMENT IN INDO-US RELATIONS. THIS ASSESSMENT MAY BE SOMEWHAT OVERDRAWN. CHAVAN'S NON-IDEOLOGICAL, PRAGMATIC ORIENTATION. MRS. GANDHI'S GUIDELINES AND A BASIC CRITERION OF WHAT'S GOOD FOR INDIA WILL DETERMINE CHAVAN'S ACTIONS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.
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